

# Moral Libertarian Perspective: Political Leadership is Overrated

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In these times of uncertainty and crisis, there have been repeated calls for political leadership from many quarters of society. It is as though if our politicians would make some top-down decisions for us, everything will be alright again. Of course, those calling for political leadership from different parts of the political spectrum expect really different kinds of decisions to be made, so in reality, no political leader can hope to answer all these wishes for leadership satisfactorily. In fact, a leader that can unite the country and make strong decisions that most people can accept has always been an unlikely thing. Former US President Ronald Reagan was arguably the most popular Western leader in recent decades, but plenty of people strongly disliked him and his policies. Furthermore, the dream of unity behind a 'strong leader' is becoming increasingly impossible with the increasing fragmentation and polarization of our political landscape. But, a more fundamental question is, is this the right dream to have, in the first place?

At this point, I should perhaps declare my position upfront. As a moral libertarian who believes in all individuals having an equal amount of moral agency, I simply do not believe in governments and political leaders making top-down decisions for all. Therefore, of course I don't believe in all society uniting behind a strong leader. I do not believe in political leadership for most issues, simply. But since people with ideological beliefs must still try to make their case in the free market of ideas using facts and ideology-neutral logic, in the rest of this article I will focus on just that.

Those calling for political leadership usually do so for two reasons: 1) either they want something fixed but don't know exactly how to, or 2) they want certain things fixed a certain way, but believe that only a government can do it. In fact, political leadership may seem the most immediate solution for both scenarios, but it certainly isn't the best solution for either.

If you want something fixed and your first thought is to call on the government to provide a solution, it effectively means that you trust the 'wisdom' of politicians more than your own wisdom, your family and friends' wisdom, and your neighbours' wisdom. However, history has shown this to be an often incorrect call. In fact, since all human beings are imperfect, the politicians are bound to get some things wrong, and even if just by chance, you, your family and friends, and your neighbours are bound to get at least some of these same things right. Therefore, placing your trust in politicians is effectively letting other people make decisions for you, even though you could have done better yourself. Furthermore, politics is too often a game of power struggle, alliances and deceit, and politicians may make decisions that are not truly guided by their conscience. Placing your blind trust in politicians is something only fools do. Instead, the free market of ideas, being made up of the collective wisdom of many minds competing against each other, will always provide a much better solution.

More commonly, people call for political leadership because they think they need the power of government to change things. In many cases, however, this lack of ability for change outside government is because governments have appropriated certain powers for themselves at some point in history, power that they should not have had in the first place. In many cases, community-driven change, inspired by solutions selected from the free market of ideas, would have provided both a more effective solution, and a smoother and quicker path to change, if not for the government being a roadblock. For example, governments decided that they should have monopoly control over marriage around the 18th century or so. Fast forward to more recent times, and any change to marriage laws, whether it be the introduction of no-fault divorce, or the inclusion of same-sex couples, have become something that needs government approval. Hence these issues also needlessly became political issues, and often political footballs used by politicians for various purposes. If the government had never appropriated marriage for itself, the community could have resolved these issues simply by vigorous debate in the free market of ideas. Therefore, next time you come across an issue that looks like it can only be solved by the government, you should think about if it is really that the government should give up some of its control over society and individuals.

Another area where government intervention is often called for is education. Specifically, what should be taught in our public schools forms a large part of the ongoing culture wars. Just in the West in the past ten years or so, there have been calls for and against things like environmentalism and climate change, indigenous history, colonial history, feminist and LGBT history, LGBT acceptance, competing versions of citizenship education, and competing theories of Darwinian evolution and intelligent design to be taught in public schools. In fact, so that governments and public schooling could be as value-neutral as possible, it should always be wrong to use public school teaching to advance any ideological agenda. Public schools should stick to teaching uncontroversial things, uncontroversial meaning almost universally accepted by consensus in the particular field of study. For example, Darwinian evolution is uncontroversial within the context of Biology, but some parts of feminist history remain controversial in the wider field of history. Proponents of views and theories still considered controversial should refrain from trying to make it into school curricula; they are instead welcome to spread their ideas in other ways. Under this doctrine, there should be much less need for 'political leadership' in what schools teach.

In conclusion, I strongly believe that asking for more political leadership is misguided. Instead, we should reflect on what further areas the government could give up its control, and let individuals and society have more freedom.